

# *Chutzpah Galleries*

*Presents*

Inquire Within

by

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## Inquire Within

My first serious spiritual experiment was prompted by dire need. Homeless, scared and confused, any remaining illusion of control over my life had given way to hopelessness. I was scuffling along a country road with no goal or direction other than stave off starvation another day. I had finally hit rock bottom. In abject desperation I began a dialog with the Universe, one that will never end. In retrospect my entry into the world of the spirit was almost comical. There's nothing like a total skeptic's internal dialog.

That first inquiry began something like this. "Okay, I don't believe in this at all but I'm desperate. I've tried to control my life but can't do it. It doesn't feel right no matter what I try. Now every wise guy who ever lived says if you ask for help you'll get it so I'm asking. Help!" I prefaced my request with disbelief and didn't ask for any specific deity, divine being or reference any religious tradition. I think that's a significant point. Belief or lack thereof is not important. Honest skepticism is possibly the best point of departure for a spiritual life. Heart-felt need carried the sincerity of my request.

After that brief but intense internal monolog I forgot about it as I went on bumbling about scrounging something to eat or a place to sleep. I forgot about it until three days later when a blaze of energy came through the top of my head. It was so powerful I fell to my knees with tears flowing down my face. The message was both simple and complex. It contained two elements. The first was a sense of understanding the cause of my difficulties. The second part was a visual image of a sculpture that perfectly expressed my first moment of enlightenment.

While the entire message was complete in a fraction of a second, it took a bit more time for the ideas to blossom into consciousness. The essence was that I was trying to dominate my surroundings to protect myself from my own fears. There was a mitigating element; it wasn't my fault but the result of my training. This was especially noticeable in dealings with people where I had been trained to use intellect, emotional force, even manners and clothing to project assumed superiority. In reality, I was trying to control the world so I didn't have to deal with my anxieties and insecurities. Fortunately I was a failure.

My appreciation of that inspiration kept growing as I discovered a depth of understanding that extended beyond merely recognizing the limits of my own ineffectiveness. In the passing years I've learned that many of those fears were inherent in my animal heritage. They weren't specific to my existence. I discovered the great value of society is our banding together to provide security from the uncertainties of earthly life. However that leaves unconscious remnants of the fears we are escaping in our patterns of behavior.

This was a huge concept to embrace as it started to illuminate the ancestry of my own insecurities. Thankfully, there was a second part of that inspiration as I now recognize the event. It was an intense visualization of a sculpture expressing the

Biblical quotation "... And they shall beat their swords into plowshares." I saw a sword with just a bit of blade left on the grip. The rest of the blade had been beaten until it flowed into a plow shape. The image was crystal clear at the time but faded to a feeling that was my motivator in creation. It took fourteen years to complete.

Why so long? A good deal of the time I was homeless. I'd never done metal sculpture. I had to design and build the piece with only the crudest of tools until the very end of the process but mostly I had to learn to live the lesson I had been given. That was what really took so long. The message was not fully realized even when the sculpture *Inquire Within* had been completed but it was so driven home that I would never do more than backslide a bit. The process of unwinding the emotional defenses that life and society had taught me evolved from stopping poor behavior to creating the goodness that would supplant it. The process isn't finished, but I've evolved far enough to focus on opening the heart.

Though I'd had an inspired vision of a sculpture it still took some years to design the specifics. I learned that the shape I sought wasn't precisely a plowshare but actually a moldboard and plowshare. That understanding slowly percolated into consciousness after studying the history of plows, beginning with oxen drawn sticks and continuing to the modern industrial variety. Then there was the sword handle to consider. By now I was working entirely by feel rather than recalling the original vision. A stylized version of the hand guard of Garibaldi's dress sword seemed to be just right for the handle.

Initially, I had only a hand drill to cut the rough shapes from steel sheet. The edges were filed, and then sandpaper was used to smooth them before polishing them with rouge. It was more drilling, more filing and more blisters for months interspersed with long periods of inactivity. Years later as completion approached, I finally had access to a fair set of tools. The grip and pommel were lathed. Forging shaped the plowshare and hand guard. Once the separate pieces were formed, they were tapped and screwed together with threaded stock. After welding the pieces together, the beads were ground and polished.

I wanted the Biblical quotation etched on the one side. On the other I wished to have a design of nestled hearts, each made from two overlapping tear shapes, which I thought of as a heart swarm. Francine Larstein and David Boye who had collaborated on creating beautiful etched knives, provided the skills and tools for artistic steel etching. Francine agreed to take my designs, wax the steel, and laboriously remove the wax where the letters and hearts would be etched. David performed the acid dip for the etching. They did a beautiful job.

The finishing touches included blueing the steel and filling the etchings with 23 carat gold. I desired the beautiful colors of the natural oxidization patina that is imparted by heating steel. The sculpture was polished to a near mirror finish, cleaned as meticulously as possible and placed it in an electric kitchen oven with a glass door that had the thermostat modified so it would heat to 600° I placed

the sculpture in the oven and watched it anxiously for about two and a half hours until the colors seemed just right. The gold was applied to the etchings via brush, and the metal sculpture was complete.

I wasn't through yet. It seemed to need a stand. My favorite version of the "beat to plowshares" quotation finishes something like, "... and each shall have his own vine and fig tree." My interpretation of that idea is that every person will be able to initiate and be responsible for the actions that sustain their lives. I sought to express that hope by carving an imaginary wooden vine and tree hybrid whose branches would support a platform on which rested the sculpture. That took another year to make. After fourteen years, I had succeeded in expressing the wonder of my first conscious experiment in the spirit.

Now ideally the story should stop there but there is one last oddity, sort of a cosmic coincidence. About fifteen years after the completion of *Inquire Within* the wooden stand was stolen from my little rural shack. A trail of broken parts led directly to the home from which a couple of kids were known to burglarize neighbors if they thought they might steal drugs or money. When neither was found in my home they stole numerous things just to express their need for the sense of power over another. The wooden stand was stolen. I zeroed in on the culprits and posted stolen notices at the end of their driveway. They panicked and threw the sculpture's stand into a small ravine formed by a creek where someone eventually discovered the pieces some weeks later.

Here is the universe-works-in-strange-ways ending. Those kids threw the stand into the ravine breaking up a year's work of love. It was almost thirty years to the day after the original moment of inspiration had knocked me to my knees about fifty yards away from the little creek in which they tried to hide the evidence of their theft. Their actions seemed to exemplify almost exactly the failing that had caused me to start my inward inquiry all those years before. The Universe has a cosmic sense of communication indeed.